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Letter dated 5 August 2011 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the Security Council

Further to my latest report to the Security Council concerning the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2011/406), I hereby request the Security Council to consider the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which is due to expire on 31 August 2011. In a letter dated 22 July 2011 addressed to me, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Emigrants of Lebanon requested that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of one year, without amendment.

UNIFIL continues to play a crucial role in ensuring peace and stability in southern Lebanon, as well as full respect for the Blue Line by both parties. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL continues to monitor the cessation of hostilities and assist the Lebanese Armed Forces in taking steps towards the establishment between the Blue Line and the Litani River of an area free of any unauthorized armed personnel, assets and weapons. UNIFIL also takes all necessary action within its capabilities to ensure that its area of operations is not utilized for hostile activities of any kind.

Cooperation between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces continues to be essential for the implementation of the UNIFIL mandate. At the tripartite meeting held on 13 July 2011, the Lebanese Armed Forces reiterated the firm commitment of the Government of Lebanon to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) and its continued cooperation with UNIFIL in this regard. This commitment was echoed by the Prime Minister, Najib Mikati, when he visited the UNIFIL area of operations on 16 July 2011, accompanied by the Minister of Defence and the Commander and senior generals of the Lebanese Armed Forces.

UNIFIL and Lebanese Armed Forces continue their joint operational activities, including an average of 13 counter-rocket-launching operations during each 24-hour period and six daily foot patrols, while operating 18 co-located checkpoints, 6 of which are on the Litani River. The two forces recently conducted several large-scale joint capability exercises on land and at sea.

The liaison and coordination arrangements of UNIFIL with the parties, including the tripartite mechanism, have facilitated a number of recent constructive and pragmatic measures and served to build trust.

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After a long impasse in the process of visibly marking the Blue Line due to a lack of consensus over contentious points, the parties responded positively to the most recent initiative of UNIFIL to proceed with the marking of non-contentious points. I am optimistic that after a long hiatus the marking process can now continue in earnest with the requisite support of mine action within the mission.

The parties have also agreed to discuss maritime security issues through the tripartite mechanism, with the possible inclusion of naval experts. UNIFIL will continue to work with both parties on the modalities for taking these discussions forward.

UNIFIL, after intensive engagement and discussions with both parties, finalized its proposal regarding the security arrangements to facilitate the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from northern Ghajar. On 25 June 2011, UNIFIL submitted its proposal to the parties for their formal adoption.

The overall attitude of the local population towards UNIFIL remains positive as it continues to carry out its operational activities, including up to 10,000 patrols per month throughout its area of operations. This notwithstanding, beyond the incidents reported to the Security Council through my periodic reports on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), several incidents of unfriendly behaviour and freedom of movement restrictions towards UNIFIL patrols and personnel occurred late in June 2011. Some of the incidents involved stone-throwing and the taking of United Nations property, such as cameras, geographical information systems, communication equipment and maps, from UNIFIL personnel by local civilians. UNIFIL strongly protested about the incidents to the Lebanese Armed Forces. The UNIFIL Force Commander has instructed UNIFIL troops to apply vigorously the rules of engagement in defence of themselves and their property. UNIFIL will continue to work closely with the Lebanese authorities, with the aim of minimizing the occurrence of such incidents.

The freedom of movement of UNIFIL and the security and safety of its personnel is integral to the effective execution of its tasks. The Security Council in its resolution 1773 (2007) urged all parties to cooperate fully with the United Nations and UNIFIL, and to abide scrupulously by their obligation to respect the safety of UNIFIL and other United Nations personnel, including by avoiding any course of action which endangers United Nations personnel and by ensuring that UNIFIL is accorded full freedom of movement within its area of operations. The primary responsibility for ensuring freedom of movement to UNIFIL personnel in the area of operations lies with the Lebanese authorities.

I am encouraged by the engagement of UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces in the strategic dialogue process, to which I attach great importance. The strategic dialogue aims to carry out analysis of ground forces and maritime assets, and to set a series of benchmarks reflecting the correlation between the capacities and responsibilities of UNIFIL and those of the Lebanese Armed Forces, with a view to identifying Lebanese Armed Forces requirements for implementing tasks mandated in resolution 1701 (2006). I hope that the pace of the strategic dialogue can be accelerated. The long-term objective of UNIFIL is to gradually transfer responsibilities currently carried out by the Force, on land and at sea, to the Lebanese Armed Forces, and have the Lebanese Armed Forces assume effective security control over the UNIFIL area of operations and Lebanese territorial waters, in line with resolution 1701 (2006).

The total number of military personnel, as at 15 July 2011, stands at 12,091. That number includes 11,135 UNIFIL ground troops deployed in two sectors, and 616 personnel serving in the Maritime Task Force. The UNIFIL civilian component numbers 354 international and 658 national staff.

I am grateful to the 36 troop-contributing countries that make up UNIFIL for their ongoing commitment. That commitment, coupled with the development of a strategic partnership with the Lebanese Armed Forces, has permitted the successful implementation of several key aspects of resolution 1701 (2006). However, as the UNIFIL mandate approaches its expiration date, it is clear that more work remains to be done.

I also would like to express my appreciation to the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Asarta, and to all the military and civilian personnel of UNIFIL, for the work they are carrying out in southern Lebanon in the service of peace.

Regarding the financial aspects of UNIFIL, by its resolution 65/303 the General Assembly appropriated to the Special Account for UNIFIL a total amount of US$ 545.5 million gross for the maintenance of the Force for the period from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012. Should the Security Council decide to extend the mandate of the Force beyond 31 August 2011, the cost of maintaining it will be limited to the amounts approved by the General Assembly.

As at 31 May 2011, unpaid assessed contributions to the UNIFIL Special Account amounted to $58 million. Total outstanding assessed contributions for all peacekeeping operations at the same date amounted to $1,849.2 million. I appeal to all Member States to pay their assessments promptly and in full to clear all remaining arrears.

As at 14 July 2011, amounts owed to troop contributors totalled $13.1 million. Reimbursement of troop- and contingent-owned equipment costs have been made for the periods up to 31 May 2011 and 31 March 2011, respectively, in accordance with the quarterly payment schedule.

With the above information in mind, I recommend that the Security Council extend the mandate of UNIFIL for a further period of 12 months, until 31 August 2012.

I should be grateful if you would bring this letter to the attention of the members of the Council.

(*Signed*) **BAN** Ki-moon